

UPDATE on the AMERICAS

A bi-monthly publication of the Rochester Committee on Latin America

A Taskforce of Matro Justice

August—September 2007

CRISIS IN COLOMBIA

Three members of a recent delegation from Central New York to Colombia will give us a multi-media update on the political, economic, cultural and human rights situations in that country at ROCLA's monthly forum on Wednesday, September 5, at 7 o'clock PM, Downtown Presbyterian Church (DUPC).

Speakers include:

Professor Colleen Kattau of Cortland College, who also sings with Charlie King and will sing to us as part of the presentation;

Laura McDonald, an activist from Ithaca who spent six months with the Guatemala Accompaniment Project;

Julianne Oldfield, an activist from Syracuse, who has served three months in federal prison for civil disobedience at the US Army School of the Americas (SOA).

The delegation also visited their Sister City and met in Bogota with US, Colombia and UN officials to talk about US Plan Colombia and the drug war.



DUPC is at 121 N. Fitzhugh Street, across from the City Hall parking lot, where free parking is available after 5 PM. DUPC is wheelchair-accessible and looped for the hearing-impaired.

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ROCLA Programs and Actions every First Wednesday 7:00 PM Downtown Presbyterian Church 121 N. Fitzhugh St. Free and open to the public. Wheelchair accessible Free parking across the street in City Hall Parking Lot

Metro Justice of Rochester, Inc.
THE ROCHESTER COMMITTEE
ON LATIN AMERICA
167 Flanders St.
Rochester, NY 14619

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ROCLA Participates in 18th Pastors for Peace Challenge to Immoral U.S. Blockade of Cuba

- by Vic Vinkey

Once again ROCLA has helped the people of Cuba and struck a blow against the illegal and immoral blockade of that island ! Over fifty donors and many volunteer workers pitched in to send an impressive 88 boxes of medical aid (including \$2,000 of newly purchased medicine) on its way to Cuba on a Pastors for Peace truck. Channel 13 covered the truck loading on the evening news. Also, a photo of the loading and a description of our efforts appear in a July 30th Democrat & Chronicle article about Cuban Rochester.

On July 17th the Pastors for Peace caravan arrived at the Mexican border. U.S. customs insisted on unloading and inspecting all boxes and, without reason, they chose to impound all personal computers. But



all other aid was, eventually, allowed to pass. The victorious caravanistas returned to the U.S. on July 28th. The computer impounding will be challenged

in future weeks.

These and other efforts have brought us to the point where, according to recent polls, two thirds of Americans favor normalization of relations with Cuba, and 55 percent of Cuban-Americans support ending all restrictions on travel. Members of both the house and Senate are now sponsoring legislation that would move us toward a more rational relationship

with Cuba, our neighbor in the Americas. We will let readers know as soon as we have more information about the Bill in Congress.

More Help for Haiti

Spiritus Christi Church raised \$4,239 for Sarah and Kevin's education and water projects in Borgne! ROCLA supports their projects. They go to Haiti again in August, returning at end of September.

Labor Film Festival

- by Marilyn Anderson

You have two opportunities to view **THE THREE BURIALS OF MELQUIADES ESTRADA**, this year's Labor Film with a Latin American Theme: Friday, September 21, 8:00 P.M.
Sunday, September 23, 7:00 P.M.
Dryden Theater, George Eastman House
900 East Avenue

ROCLA, as one of the official sponsors of the Labor Film Series, will receive tickets which will be available at the September meeting, as well as at the theater door before each film during Sept. and Oct. Look for me there and I will be happy to give you, as a ROCLA member, a ticket and a film schedule. Also, read the ANNOUNCE e-list for notice about each film, or go to www.rochesterlabor.org for the complete schedule.

For at least seven years, (I have lost count!) ROCLA has supported the annual Labor Film Series at the Dryden Theater. During the 18 year history of the Series, many films, a number have been made by Latin American film makers, have brought us aspects of labor subjects in different countries from Argentina to Mexico.

This year's film, **THE THREE BURIALS OF MELQUIADES ESTRADA** shows the murder of an illegal Mexican worker, a troubled border agent, and the efforts of his friend to bring some measure of justice to honor his memory.

Uplifting Update from Randall Shea in Guatemala

"You may recall that a young man from our village, Emiliano Panjoj Perez, graduated from the University of San Carlos in May of 2006 as an Agronomist. He now teaches natural science classes to the seventh, eighth and ninth graders in our middle school. Emiliano wrote in early 2006 his graduation thesis entitled Proposal for Natural Resource Management in Santa María Tzejá. Just last month, we were all delighted to find out that Emiliano was awarded the

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THE THREE BURIALS OF MELQUIADES ESTRADA

(Tommy Lee Jones, US 2005, 121 min., 35mm)
Ranch hand Pete Perkins (Tommy Lee Jones) kidnaps border patrol officer Mike (Barry Pepper) who accidentally shot and killed Pete's best buddy, illegal immigrant Melquiades Estrada (Julio Cedillo). Then Pete and Mike set out on a harrowing horseback journey to return Mel's rapidly decaying body to his family in Mexico. Part horror movie and part classic western, *The Three Burials*' brilliant script is by Guillermo Arriaga, author of *Amores Perros*, *21 Grams*, and *Babel*. Stylistically breathtaking, Jones' feature directorial debut is one of the best American films of the current decade.

While **THREE BURIALS** is not an "easy" film to watch, it rewards. My words here only faintly convey the artistry and the "spine tingling" action it offers. It tells us of one of many injustices that happen on the US and Mexico border—but with a difference that probably will keep you glued to your seat.



AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL URGENT ACTION

90 cents to help save a life? That's the cost of a postcard stamp to Ecuador. (Note: Barbara Deming of AI Brockport reports that because of the anthrax scare it's better to send postcards than letters.) It's easy to write a message on behalf of these two Ecuadorans. Simply use the information provided under "Recommended Action." Go to Amnestyusa.org/urgent/ to learn about lives that have been saved by people from all over the world writing urgent actions on their behalf.

Amnesty International's mission is to undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination, within the context of its work to promote all human rights.

25 July 2007. UA 193/07 Fear for safety
ECUADOR Jaime Polivio Pérez Lucero (m), community leader in García Moreno parish; Mercy Catalina Torres Terán (f); and Others opposed to the Intag copper mining project.

According to reports, community leader Jaime Polivio Pérez Lucero has been threatened and activist Mercy Catalina Torres Terán has been attacked, as a result of their opposition to a mining project close to their homes in the Intag area of Imbabura province, northern Ecuador. Their lives, and those of others who voice opposition to the mine, are in danger. Jaime Polivio Pérez Lucero, from Garcia Moreno parish in Imbabura, a group of villages close to a site where the authorities and a mining company are planning to excavate for copper, has received a series of death threats in recent months. In December 2006, while he was taking part in a protest against the mining project, Jaime Polivio Pérez Lucero was reportedly approached by an armed civilian. The armed man told Jaime Polivio Pérez: "Si te segues oponiendo a la minera vamos a tener que matarte" (if you continue to oppose the mining company we will have to kill you).

According to reports, the armed civilians and security guards used tear gas and shot at the demonstrators, injuring several people. Among those injured was Jaime Polivio Pérez's brother, Israel Pérez, who

was shot.

Following the incident, Jaime Polivio Pérez reportedly received several anonymous calls on his mobile phone, in which the caller said, "Si no abandonas la dirigencia te vamos a matar. Deja de subir a Barcelona porque de caso contrario tendrás tu merecido" (If you do not quit the leadership [of a community organization in García Moreno] we are going to kill you. Stop going to Barcelona [one of the communities of the García Moreno parish] or you will get what you deserve).

On 23 June 2007, according to reports, another member of the community received an anonymous email referring to a plan to kill Jaime Polivio Pérez. On 9 July, activist Mercy Catalina Torres was outside her home in Garcia Moreno when she was reportedly beaten by a man wearing a balaclava. She was cut and bruised in the attack. Mercy Catalina Torres had allegedly been threatened in her home two months before the attack, when a man apparently shouted at her: "porque ya vino el carro, te salvaste perra" ("because someone just arrived in a car, you saved yourself, bitch").

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Randall Shea in Guatemala

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Dr. Antonio Sandoval medal from his faculty in recognition for having turned in the best thesis in 2006. Emiliano was selected for this honor from a group of over 100 graduating students.

"As part of his efforts to combine natural science theory with practice, Emiliano led 40 seventh graders out on an all day hike to the "nearby" Cerro Cantil, which is a virgin rainforest / jungle area situated on a hilly ridge. Emiliano prepared the students beforehand by having them look up the meaning of 15 or 20 terms related to the rainforest ecosystem. He encouraged the group to watch and listen carefully during the hike, and frequently paused to ask the group questions which would spur reflection and discussion. All in all, it was a wonderful and fun learning experience."

UPDATE on the AMERICAS

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Jaime Polivio Pérez and Mercy Catalina Torres reported the incidents to the local Attorney's Office. However, to date, Amnesty International is not aware of any investigation being opened into the threats or the attack, and no protection has been granted to them.

Both Jaime Polivio Pérez and Mercy Catalina Torres have been very active and outspoken in their

campaigning against the planned copper mine. They believe that the communities which will be affected by the mining project have not been consulted in a meaningful, open and transparent way by the authorities. Members of these communities are concerned about the environmental impact it might have on the area, a nature reserve where most inhabitants depend on agriculture.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

During a visit to Ecuador in November 2006, Amnesty International visited Imbabura and met with some members of the communities affected by the mining project in Intag. The delegation received testimonies and reports of acts of intimidation, harassment and attacks against those who campaign against the mining project. Amnesty International wrote to the authorities asking for investigations to be opened into these incidents. However, to date, the organization is not aware of any investigations into these events.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible:

- expressing concern for the safety of Jaime Polivio Pérez Lucero, Mercy Catalina Torres Terán, and other inhabitants of the Intag area, Imbabura, who are opposed to the copper mining project;
- expressing concern that Jaime Polivio Pérez Lucero has been repeatedly threatened with death since December 2006, and that Mercy Catalina Torres Terán was beaten in July 2007;
- stating that these acts of intimidation appear to be linked to their campaigning actions to defend the rights of the communities in Intag to a meaningful, open and transparent consultation prior to the development of any mining project in the area;
- urging the authorities to take steps to guarantee the safety of Jaime Polivio Pérez Lucero and Mercy Catalina Torres Terán, in accordance with their own wishes;
- urging the authorities to carry out an independent and impartial investigation into the death threat received by Jaime Polivio Pérez Lucero and the attack against Mercy Catalina Torres Terán, making

the results public and bringing those responsible to justice;

- asking to be informed of the results of these investigation.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of the Interior:

Dr. Gustavo Larrea

Ministro de Gobierno, Policía

Justicia, Cultos y Municipalidades

Ministerio de Gobierno y Policía

Espejo y Benalcázar, Quito- Ecuador

Fax: 011 593 229 55666 ext. 155 or

011 593 229 55666 ext. 150 – 151 (ask for fax tone)

Salutation: Dear Minister/Señor Ministro

Attorney General:

Dr. Jorge Germán

Ministro Fiscal General del Estado

Fiscalía General del Estado

Av. Eloy Alfaro N° 32-240 y República

Quito, Ecuador

Fax: 011 593 22558561 (please keep trying)

Salutation: Dear Minister/Señor Ministro

Minister of Energy and Mines:

Econ. Alberto Acosta

Ministro de Energía y Minas

Ministerio de Energía y Minas

Juan León Mera N° 26-220 y Orellana

Quito - Ecuador

Fax: 011 593 22906350

Salutation: Dear Attorney General/Sr. Ministro

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.

Check with the AIUSA Urgent Action Office if sending appeals after 12 September 2007.

Your ROCLA Membership In Action

ROCLA's Mission Statement begins: "For many years ROCLA has sought to be a bridge between the Rochester community and the people of Latin America." This "bridge" includes "offering financial support to frontline organizations that are dealing with issues of oppression and injustice." Each year the Steering Committee determines how best to use money from your membership dues, the Alternative Fair, and the Rice and Beans Dinner, to strengthen the Latin American movement, address root causes of Latin America-related problems here and there, and support critical hands-on activities.

We would appreciate your reactions to this year's list as well as your ideas for future recipients.

Local recipients:

Farmworker Legal Services – Jim Schmidt
Rural and Migrant Ministry – Luis Torres
Centro Independiente de Trabajadores Agrícolas – Ami Kadar

Immigration Law Program – Walter Ruehle
New York State Labor-Religion Coalition (see Border Witness flyer)

Latin America Projects involving Rochesterians:

New school, planned high school, Guatemala – Randall Shea

Water and education project, Haiti – Sarah Brownell and Kevin Foos

Rural village development projects, Dominican Republic – Joanne Peterson

Sustainable agriculture and water project, Guatemala – Todd Bauer

EPIC – in memory of K'ai Clouds, agronomist (see article, elsewhere)

US-Latin America solidarity organizations:

IFCO/Pastors for Peace, Cuba – Vic Vinkey and Kathy Goforth organizers.

CISPES (Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador

Nicaragua Network – Arnie Matlin is on the Executive Committee.

NISGUA (Network In Solidarity with the people of Guatemala)

Mexico Solidarity Network

Venezuela Solidarity Network

Solidarity movement organizing:

Latin America Solidarity Coalition (LASC) (new recipient) – Peter Mott on Coordinating Committee. INTERCONNECT, for Grassroots Movement-Building and Sharing of Resources within the US-Latin America Solidarity Community; national newsletter produced quarterly for 13 years – Peter and Gail Mott, co-editors.

Downtown United Presbyterian Church, for use of church for ROCLA meetings, Rice and Beans Dinner, press conferences and other events.

SPOTLIGHT ON: Marcos Orozco Agri-cultural Foundation: Remembering Kai Clouds

- by Marilyn Anderson

[Ed. Note: Let us know which ROCLA-supported group(s) you would like to know more about. We will include them in the next issue.]

We on the ROCLA steering committee believe that our donations should help many kinds of organizations related to Latin America and the Caribbean - from larger national ones focused on coordinating efforts nationwide that might relate to more local economic, educational, humanitarian or human right issues.

Just one example, of an organization that we have continued to support over the years will resonate with a number of ROCLA members. That is the Marcos Orozco Agri-cultural Foundation (Fundación Agr-Cultura Marcos Orozco). They are headquartered in Chimaltenango, Guatemala but associated for fundraising in the US with the EPIC Foundation located in Allenspark, CO. (some may also remember when Paul McKay came to Rochester a few years ago to speak to us about their work. www.epicprojects.org)

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White Dove Awards 20th anniversary in 2008!

As readers know, ROCLA's liveliest and most anticipated evening of each year is the Rice and Beans Dinner in the spring. Each year we select recipients for the White Dove Awards, which are presented at that dinner to a person or group that has made a significant contribution to peace, justice, and understanding in Latin America. The Steering Committee already is discussing the 20th Anniversary Celebration in 2008. If you have individuals or groups you would like us to consider, please e-mail Bob Kaiser, Convener, at rkaiser3@rochester.rr.com.

A partial list of international recipients includes:

1995 – Jennifer Harbury, human rights lawyer whose three-year quest to find her Guatemalan husband revealed high-level involvement between the CIA and the Guatemalan military in his capture, torture, and murder.

1999 – Charles Kernaghan, Director of the National Labor Committee, focusing on issue of worker and human rights in Central America

2000 – Equal Exchange, working to create social change through solidarity, sustainability, living wages and fair traded (delicious) coffee.

2001 – Grahame Russell, Director of Rights Action, supporting development and human rights projects in Mexico and Central America.

2002 – Eric LeCompte, Director, School of Americas Watch (SOAW).

2003 – Martha Thompson, for her work with and leadership in OXFAM - in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala and Cuba.

2004 – Tom Hansen, Director of the Mexico solidarity Network

2005 – Pablo Menendez for his unique achievements as a Cuban musician, bringing joy and creating community for people North and South.

2006 – The People and Government of Venezuela in recognition of their humanitarian oil program.

2007 – Magda Enriquez, Ambassador-at-Large of the Republic of Nicaragua.

Local White Dove Awards have been presented to, among others:

1990 – Arnie Matlin - for his tireless and effective work in solidarity with the people of Nicaragua and their Revolution.

1991 - Marilyn Anderson – for her dedication to justice for the indigenous peoples of Guatemala through her weaving, photography, writings, and her presence among them.

1995 – Peter and Gail Mott, for continued leadership to inform and involve people in the struggle for peace and justice in Central America.

1999 – Alison Clarke – for her leadership in helping found ROCLA, the original Metro Justice, Politics of Food, Committee for Justice in Southern Africa and the Hunger Action Network of NY State.

2000 – Enrique Cadena, Native of Mexico, former priest at Spiritus Christi, who led delegations to Chiapas twice a year to raise consciousness about what it means to walk with the poor.

2001 – Max Levine, for his coordination of the Pastors for Peace Friendshipments to Nicaragua and Cuba, and for personally repairing hundreds of bicycles, wheelchairs and typewriters that were shipped there.

2002 – St. Joseph's House of Hospitality, for unselfish service and vision and for their involvement in the Close the SOA campaign.

2002 - Nazareth College Social Justice Group, organized by Harry Murray, whose efforts include annual participation in the November Close the SOA in Ft. Benning, Georgia.

2003 – Ciudad Hermana, Sister City with El Sauce, Nicaragua, working to support the goals of the Revolution.

2004 – CUSLAR (The Committee on US-Latin American Relations) and their Bikes for Chiapas project and Sister City collaboration with a community in Colombia.

2005 – Henry Padron – for his many contributions as a musician-poet, educator and advocate for Vieques.

2006 – Vic Vinkey for numerous contributions to the community through his involvement in ROCLA and the IFCO/Pastors for Peace Caravan

2007 – Michael Argaman, who has worked tirelessly for peace and understanding between the U.S. and Nicaragua.

Remembering Kai Clouds

Continued

Our donations to EPIC are in memory of Kai Clouds, an organic agronomist from the Ithaca area (but with ties to Rochester) who was murdered in 1980 because of his work teaching organic farming practices to indigenous people in Guatemala.

The work of Marcos Orozco Agri-cultural Foundation especially focuses on teaching organic agricultural practices and they have made impressive strides in this work. One of their particular emphasis now is to form programs for young farmers to help them grow crops using better practices resulting in more productive and ecological outcomes. An important goal of this program is to give hope and encourage young people to stay in Guatemala and not to migrate to the US.

ROCHESTER COMMITTEE ON LATIN AMERICA (ROCLA)

ROCLA for many years has sought to be a bridge between the Rochester community and the people of Latin America. Monthly meetings on the 1st Wednesday of each month at the Downtown United Presbyterian Church provide an opportunity to learn more about what is going on in that part of the world. In addition to providing information, ROCLA is committed to working for systemic justice and supports numerous organizations that are on the front line of this endeavor. School of the Americas Watch, the Mexico Solidarity Network, Rights Action and the Rochester Labor Film Festival are among the many groups that receive assistance and encouragement.

ROCLA Steering Committee

Marilyn Anderson, David Eisenberg, Hernan Escalante, Marilyn and Bob Kaiser (convener), John Locke, Gail and Peter Mott, Vic Vinkey, Mike Wahl, Tom Ward.

Update on the Americas Publishing Team

Editors: Gail and Peter Mott; Designer: John Locke

Bill Jungles' Mexican Documentaries

ROCLA's October Program

Acclaimed documentary videographer, Bill Jungles, who also is a long-time Buffalo activist, will share his work with ROCLA at the October meeting on Wednesday, October 3, 7 PM, at DUPC. His focus will be on his many projects and documentary work in Mexico. At the time of this writing Jungles is in a remote part of that country. Bill Jungles, PhD, is a retired professor in the Communications Department at SUNY Fredonia. In 2004 his documentary on workers confronting NAFTA, *Sobre pasando la línea / Crossing the Line*, won the BEST OF FESTIVAL AWARD at the 2004 Berkeley Video & Film Festival.

BORDER WITNESS DELEGATION with the LABOR-RELIGION COALITION OF NEW YORK STATE

El Paso & Ciudad Juarez

October 30 - November 4, 2007

Learn about NAFTA and labor & trade, immigration, the environment, women & children, education, health, human rights \$1,750 per person. Partial scholarships available. Includes round trip air fare from Albany, NY to El Paso, Texas, transportation to and within Mexico, meals, housing, translation, stipends for host groups in Mexico, plus preparatory materials. Cost is based on double occupancy; single rooms are available for an additional cost. For general information about Labor-Religion Coalition delegations, visit www.labor-religion.org. An application to print and mail is available on-line.

FOR INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPATION: Maureen Casey, International Project Coordinator New York State Labor-Religion Coalition 800 Troy-Schenectady Road, Latham, NY 12110 518/ 272-8275; maureenc@labor-religion.org

